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## THE HERMIT OF THE LAKES.

It is to be presumed that few persons have visited and viewed the delightful scenery of Killarney—have climbed its mountains, or skirted its lakes, without having heard something of this extraordinary ascetic, who some years since took up his abode in the deserted and mouldering ruins of the abbey of Mucruss,\* and who, for reasons known but to himself, became the companion of the lonely dead, relinquishing for ever the society of the living, save when compelled by the cravings of pinching hunger to ask an alms from some neighbouring peasant.

Having in early life visited those delightful scenes, whose varied beauties mock alike the boldest efforts of the pencil and the pen, while ranging along the lakes, or climbing the mountain's ridge, we were accompanied by a youth, whom, although in the costume of the country, sans hat or shoes, we found to be extremely intelligent, and well informed in legendary lore, and who, as we sauntered along, by way of amusing us, recounted many a wonderful story of the doings of the good people, or fairies, who he averred were at one period the only inhabitants of which Glenna and Mangerton† could boast. Even now, he assured us, on many a clear moonlight night, troops of them were frequently seen cantering down from the mountains on horses not bigger than hares, or sailing on the lakes in vessels made of cockle-shells; while at other times they would join together in the sportive dance on the beautiful green sward with which Mucruss and the surrounding islands were covered.

The evening was fine; the last sunbeam still lingered on the Eagle's Nest; and in order to obtain a more extensive view of the delightful scenery around us, we had left the beaten path, and were endeavouring to gain the summit of Glenna mountain, by scrambling up its precipitous sides with the help of the tough roots and impending boughs which sprung from the crevices of the rocks; when on a sudden I observed my guide to start, as if affrighted; and pointing to a little shallop or boat, which had just issued from a cove that lay beneath us, and contained a being of most extraordinary appearance, he exclaimed, "heaven preserve us, but I fear there's some bad luck afore us; for there's the hermit of the lakes, and whoever first sees him after his being at yonder mountain, which, yer honour, they calls the Devil's Punch Bowl,‡ is sure to meet with some accident. He has been about no good, I'll warrant him; he goes yonder to converse with a little black man, who they say is the ould boy, though I would not like to wrong him, any how." Scarcely had he uttered these words, when the root by which he was hanging gave way, and not being able to recover his hold, he was precipitated a considerable way down the mountain-side, his progress being at length arrested by the branches of an aged oak, which hung midway in the descent to the bottom. However, not having received any serious injury, he soon regained his former position, exclaiming as he approached me, "and sure, isn't it I that ought to be thankful to the Almighty, that didn't let him do his worst on me; for barrin' that he saved me, the best bone in my body would have been broken. I knew well I should meet with some accident—heaven grant the worst may be over."

Having by this time gained a position where I could with safety turn round and view the individual who had been the cause of such alarm and danger to my guide and companion, I could perceive that there was apparently some ground for the terror expressed. A cap of a conical form covered his head, while a long, black, bushy beard gave to a sharp, haggard, dark countenance an expression of savage gloominess, which even the distance could not obliterate. He was wrapped in a long loose garment, drawn tight at the middle by a belt, from which

were suspended several articles, that my guide informed me were dead men's bones, with which he was used to work his incantations, and practice his black art.

"Do you see that boat, Sir?" said the boy, "that boat was made without the help of human hands, yer honour; it is formed of the coffins of those whose souls are now doing penance; sorra a nail would ye find in it from beginnin' to end, nor was there ever a hammer raised over it—I seed it often with my own eyes, yer honour, and I can go bail for the truth of what I say; in fact he is not sauncy, for he can both raise the dead, and make the Ould Boy appear in the likeness of a man."

"And where did he come from, or where does he now live?" I enquired.

"And sure, yer honour, nobody knows where he came from, or who he is, and it's I that knows very little about him that's good, only that the neighbours say there is no fear of his being hanged for being a Christin; and if there was no harm in saying it, I believe myself that he's no very distant relation to the Ould Boy himself—though, yer honour, I would not for the best horse in yer stable, that he should hear me saying so."

Having, on further enquiry, learned that the much-dreaded individual had taken up his residence in the abbey of Mucruss, which my guide informed me was "an illegant ould ruin that every body visited," and which had for many years been a favourite burying place, in the true spirit of juvenile knight errantry, I resolved on exploring it the next morning, and if possible finding out some further particulars relative to the more than mortal who had taken up his abode within its walls. We had by this time wandered a considerable distance, and lost no time in regaining the pathway, in hopes to arrive at the inn (if it might be so called) which I had made my headquarters, before the shades of night had completely surrounded us. As the evening advanced, fear appeared to lend additional swiftness to the legs of my companion, with whom I was scarcely able to keep pace, and who every now and then looked behind him, as though he dreaded some one was pursuing us. It was late when we arrived, and the evening being somewhat cold, we found that several travellers, who were stopping at the same place, had assembled round a blazing fire of turf and bog-wood, and were, with some neighbouring cottiers, beguiling an idle hour in listening to various spirit-stirring tales of terror with which the courteous landlord was endeavouring to entertain them.

Having taken my seat on a three-legged stool, and Paddy McKew, my guide, having also posted himself in the hob or chimney-corner, appeared on thorns until he got an opportunity to communicate the particulars of our adventure. It was quite *à propos*, and drew forth many a story 'learned and long' of the wonderful doings of the Hermit of the Lakes; nor did the miraculous escape of Paddy pass unnoticed.

"And sure it's I that could tell yees a story relating to the ould carle that wud make the hair o' yer head stand upright," said a bluff-looking country fellow, whom from his western accent I deemed, I believe justly, a native of Connaught. Master O'Rourke himself was the very man on whom the Ould Boy played his pranks. One Mr. O'Mulligan was after getting in his harvest, and he proposed to give some of the boys that helped him a bit of a trate, and so he gathered some of the neighbours together in the good ould way, and he gave them lashans of the rale stuff to wash id down wid. So, d'ye see, when they were got pretty well I thank ye, so that they cared no more for seeing the Ould Boy than they wud for seeing wan of their own selves, 'troth,' says Billy McComisky, 'it is I that wish we had his reverence, the ould Hermit here; we'd be after making him play some of his strange tricks, just to enliven us a bit; and as he's fond of a drap of the cratur, why it's how I think he would have little objection.' And so it was, as it is aye said, 'speak of the devil and he'll make his appearance; who should just come round the hill but his reverence—we spied him out of the window where we sat. So out bolts Bill, and says to him, 'I hope yer reverence is well; maybe yer reverence wud like to be after wetting yer reverence's whistle?

\* For drawings and descriptions of this abbey, see last volume of our Journal.

† Very high mountains in the neighbourhood of Killarney.

‡ The name of a mountain in the neighbourhood of Killarney, in which there is an extinct volcano.

'I thank ye, Billy, but I'll take none the night.' However, after a good deal of pressing, his reverence at length consented; and so in he came, and there he stood like a *statue*, or a spectre, with his eyes fixed on the ground, neither saying aye nor no to one or other of the company; and having drank off a glass of the native, was about to be off, when Billy again says to him, 'may it please yer reverence's grace, as we are all a thrifle hearty, and up for a bit of fun, we have been after thinking that maybe yer reverence would condescend to show us some specimen of your great larning and your supernathal powers—as we understand yer reverence is well acquainted wid the black art.' So his reverence, wid a great frown, replied, 'Young man, ye know not what ye seek for—could ye stand to see the dead raised?' 'Ay troth, could I—or the Ould Boy himself,' quoth Billy. But I am not good at telling a story, genteels; and maybe you yourself, Masther O'Rourke, would have the kindness just to tell the gentlefolks the story as it occurred, as sure you have the best right to mind it, who was so near losing your life by the doings of the ould chap."

"And sure, Misther Burke, it is you that could tell a story with a grace; but as you are so condescindin', why I will do my best to tell it to the company. So d'ye see, genteels, as Misther Burke has just informed you, Billy McComisky was after asking his reverence to show them some of his tricks. So says his reverence to Billy, 'If you have a great desire, I will let you see some of your ould acquaintances.' To be sure he spoke in far more larned and nater language than I can remember. 'But,' says he, 'mind ye, my lads, if the Ould Boy runs away with one of you, while trying the experiment, you must not blame me for it, but your own curiosity. 'Whose afraid,' says Billy. So to work they went; and the boys all commenced, and swept one end of the barn quite clean. And then d'ye see, his reverence axed me could I get him a bible and a pair of mowld candles; and so, says I, 'it's I that could get you as many candles as there are days in the week, if ye wanted them; but I think it is as how there is not a bible or a testament in the parish.' But, ather bethinking myself a bit, thinks I, 'and maybe Masther Fitzhenry, the minister's nephee, would slip us the lend of one for a bit. So off I cuts, yer honours; and maybe it was I that wasn't long in bringing it to the boys, who, by the time I came back had two mowld candles nately sated upon a table, which they had placed right in the middle of the barn, d'ye see, and all round about, which the ould boy (that's the ould hermit I mane) had drawn a ring or circle with a piece of chalk. But I should have tould you they had also a chair placed beside the table, inside the ring, mind ye; and so taking the bible from me, he opened it at a sartain varse, and layin' it on the table, he asked Billy if he could read. 'Indeed I never spelt a letter in my life,' said Billy. 'Och, then, you won't do,' said his reverence; 'is there any one here that can read?' 'So,' says I, 'here am I, your reverence; and I could read, I may say, since the day I was born; for yer honours must know, although I am only a poor man now, I'm come of a good sort d'ye see—there's some of the thick blood of the country in my veins after all; and, although I say it myself, that oughtn't to say it, I got the best larning of any boy within ten miles of my father's house, d'ye see. But, as I was after telling ye, when I tould him I could both read and write, his reverence axes me, 'Young man,' says he,—for I was young then, yer honours—'young man,' says he—at the same time looking at me with both his eyes, as though he would have pierced them through my very heart, 'd'ye think ye could stan' to hold a conversation with an ould friend of your's who has been dead a while, if I were to bring him to life again?'—'And I'm the boy that could,' says I; for at that time I was neither afeard of ghost or hobgoblin, and besides that, I had taken a hearty sup d'ye see: so down he sets me on the chair, and he gives me a couple of verses to read; and says he to me 'now, Paddy O'Rourke, I know you are not a bad sort of a boy, and I would not wish that any accident should happen to ye; but as you value your life and soul, do not on any account come outside of that ring that I have chalked on the floor.' 'Never fear me,' says I—although I am bowld to confess I did feel a little twitter of terror come across my mind, just at the moment

they all began to leave me alone, with the bible and the two mowld candles; but out they went, and sure enough, as soon as they got out, what does his reverence do but very carefully locks the door on the outside—a part of the ceremony I did not much like, d'ye see; but maybe it was as how he did not wish to let his black majesty run away with me body and bones; but there I was left; and sure enough I continued reading mighty attentively, when all of a sudden I hears three great knocks upon the barn door, and just liftin' up my eyes a bit, what d'ye think does I see, but the figure upon the wall of a man that I knew right well, who was one of the greatest ould rascals about the country, and who would have been just three months dead, had he lived till next Friday. The sight of Ould Nick himself, with his club foot, could not have frightened me more; and had I been the owner of the squire's great grand estate, which to be sure I may say was mine by right, for it formerly belonged to my great grand uncle; but never mind that now, times may change again, when things will all go to their right owners—as I was saying, if I had been the owner of it at the time, I would willingly have given it to have been at the right side of the door; for I was sure and sartain that he would never let me out a livin' man, for having disturbed him from his quiet grave;—but what was I to do? His reverence had laid his biddin' upon me not to stir outside the ring—and besides I had heard him lockin' me in; so I continued with my eyes fixed upon the bible, though sorra a word could I see of what was before me; but just as I was thinking about what I had best be after doin', what should I hear but three other great loud knocks, and again lookin' up—och, genteels, the blood runs cowl'd in my ould veins as I think of it—I sees the ould lad as large as life, standing with his back against the wall, dressed in his winding-sheet, and his brogues on his feet, and his teeth grinning, and shaking his fist as though he would tear me to pieces. So it was I that didn't know what to do any how—my very knees knocked together with downright terror—when behold you, all of a sudden I hears other three great knocks; and over bouncees ould Trevor to the very edge of the ring! exclaiming 'I'm Trevor come to tear you!' What followed I know not; all I recollect is, that in a kind of mad fit I whipped up one of the candlesticks, and after throwin' it at him, I suppose I fainted and fell, as they tould me afterwards they heard a great clatter, and on comin' in, found me lying on the floor, as dead as a door nail; and many a time since have I thanked my stars that I had the good luck to fall inside the ring, for had but the black of my nail been on the outside, I would not have been now here to tell the tale. So my story is finished, genteels; and all that I say is, that I would not undergo the same again for twice as much goold as the whole wide world is worth. So here's to yer honour's safe journey."

As a kind of *finale* to the story, Burke had just mentioned that he could vouch for the truth of all Mr. O'Rourke had said—and was telling us how after they had left him inside the barn, the ould hermit commenced his incantations by walking round the barn three times, at the end of which he gave the three knocks, at the same time muttering some gibberish to himself, that they could not understand—when, in a moment, without any apparent cause, we were all thrown into the most dreadful confusion and dismay, by a tremendous explosion, which seemed to shake the house about us to its very foundation. The large fire around which we were seated was hurled about the floor in a thousand directions; the lights were extinguished, the women and children in the other end of the house uttered a dreadful scream, and several of the company, among whom were the landlord and Misther Burke, were stretched sprawling on the floor. The consternation having a little subsided, and the fire having been again gathered into its place,\* one and another once more ventured to look about them and to speak; some imagined they had been making too free with the character of the ould Hermit, and that he or his familiar had thus hoped to be revenged.

\* There are no grates in many of the houses in the country; large piles of turf and wood are heaped on the ground.

Leaving the matter to be adjusted among themselves, I was quietly slipping off to my bed, not well knowing what to think of the matter, when one of the company, a young gentleman who was stopping at the place, beckoned me to follow him to his room, where, in the greatest glee, he informed me the explosion was altogether a contrivance of his—that it had been caused by a small quantity of gunpowder, which he had put into a turf that had been previously bored for the occasion; that he and his companion had purposely introduced the stories relative to ghosts and hobgoblins, in order to give greater effect to the contrivance which he had formed to frighten the simple ones. While I could not but condemn in my own mind the impropriety of a measure which might have been productive of serious consequences, I confess I heartily enjoyed the joke, and could not but give the young traveller considerable credit for having so successfully attained his object; for never did I see a company so completely panic-struck as they appeared to be—and I certainly was enabled by the eclatissement to retire to rest in a much more pleasant mood than I otherwise should have done; for the whole affair had previously been a mystery to me, and no doubt appeared rather unaccountable. At the same time I determined to visit Mucruss Abbey with the rising sun, and if possible to find out who or what the individual was who had taken up his abode within the confines of its dreary ruins.

I was as good as my purpose; for as the grey dawn of twilight had streaked the eastern skies, I was on my road towards Mucruss, and ere the sun had topped the opposing mountain, I had gained a view of the famed Abbey, as it peeped from amidst a grove of tall and stately trees, by which it was surrounded on every side. Even now I well remember I could not but frequently pause to contemplate the grandeur and loveliness of the scenery around me. Chased by the rising sunbeams, the mists of the morning appeared fast flitting away, as if anxious again to mingle in the waters of their great parent, the Atlantic. Before me lay the lovely lake, richly embroidered with innumerable islands, and reflecting from its azure surface the beautifully-diversified scenery around—the waving forest, and the more sombre-shaded mountain from whose stupendous sides the stunted oak or the aged holly, festooned with ivy, sprung spontaneous. My path lay alongside and partly through a wood, and the scenery which frequently burst upon my view was really enchanting;—at one moment the cerulean heaven, which had been for a time obscured, appeared through some opening vista, as reflected in the broad expanse of water which lay beneath me; while at the next step my eye rested on richly planted lawns, or was borne along the hanging woods which boldly swept along the mountain's side.

Wrought by the stillness and solemnity of the scene into a kind of sublime contemplation, and almost forgetting the object of my excursion, I had strolled along to within a very short distance of the Abbey. It was at that time a fine old ruin—a picturesque emblem of greatness in decay—situated on an eminence rising over the lake, and completely surrounded by trees of various growth and species. A pointed door-way, ornamented with various mouldings, showed the entrance to the interior; while innumerable relics of mortality, piled in fantastic groups on either side the aisle, assured me of the truth of what I had been told by my guide on the preceding day, that it was the *domum ultimum* (until the resurrection) of many who had at one time given life and animation to the scenery around.

As I advanced into the interior of the choir, a feeling of peculiar solemnity appeared to steal over my soul: I experienced a kind of involuntary shudder. The place was gloomy and awful; and the idea that the only being it contained was one whose mysterious character rendered him rather an object of dread than otherwise, created an apprehension in my mind that all my efforts to the contrary could not suppress. I could almost have wished myself exhumed, and once more among those who lived and breathed. Nor were my apprehensions allayed on proceeding towards the cloister, a dismal area of considerable extent, in the midst of which spread an immense

yew, whose stem appeared to be thirty or forty feet in height, and the branches of which formed a canopy so complete, as to render the place gloomy to a degree; the light being scarcely sufficient to point out the mouldering tombstones which lay beneath its shade. Scarcely knowing whither I went, I still proceeded forward; when, on turning the angle of a corridor, which, from the information I had received from my guide, I conjectured might lead to the chamber in which the Hermit had taken up his abode, I observed at the farther end a dim sepulchral light, which seemed as though it proceeded from an expiring lamp or taper. With a palpitating heart I advanced towards it, when in an instant a sudden flash seemed to pass me by, and I was left in almost total darkness. I hastily turned, and was endeavouring to retrace my steps with that expedition which is prompted by fear; when I heard the sound of footsteps quickly following me; but unfortunately in my hurry to regain the cloister, having kept too much to one side of the aisle, my foot was tripped by some relic of mortality, and ere I could recover myself, I fell violently forward, and tumbling over a coffin, which, from having been partially decayed, burst beneath my weight, in an instant I found myself as if in the strict embrace of a lifeless body. Whether from the effect of the fright or the fall I cannot say, but one thing is certain, I was so stunned that I lay for a moment motionless as the corpse beside me, and was only roused from my stupor by feeling myself rudely raised from my position by a gaunt and grisly hand, which I could at the moment scarcely think human, so fierce was the grasp with which I was seized, but which, on approaching the cloister, I perceived to be that of the very person I had seen the evening before in the boat—who, fixing his eyes upon me with a fiend-like scowl, enquired, in a voice which thrilled through every nerve in my body, what had brought me thither?—and ere I could reply, seizing me by the shoulder, and shaking me violently, he exclaimed in terrific accents, "Presumptuous wretch, begone! and know that thou hast done to me an irreparable injury.—The spell is broken—I am undone." Then striking his hand violently on his forehead, as if in agony, "Oh, eternity, eternity! am I now to realize thy horrors?—fearful foreboding! sad reality! lost—lost—lost!"—Here clenching his hands in evident distraction, he remained a moment silent, as if lost in thought; and so petrified was I, that I really felt unable to move from the spot on which I stood. Apparently subdued in feeling, he again addressed me in a much milder mood: "Young man, I forgive your rashness. By your coming here this morning you have fulfilled an augury—you have sealed my doom: but beware! Behold in me the effects of unbounded curiosity, scepticism and impiety! God is just—and I deserve my doom; I myself made the bargain—I bartered my soul—but I will not recal past thoughts—My days are numbered—the future only remains for me." Then again, as if in the most dreadful despair, he exclaimed, "Lost—lost—lost!" As he pronounced these words, whether it was reality or the conjuration of fancy, from the state in which my mind was at the moment, I cannot tell—but I thought I perceived something again flit by me, as if in a flash of fire, and I imagined I heard the word "Away, away!" distinctly repeated. At that moment the Hermit hurried towards the entrance of the Abbey: I followed as fast as my trembling limbs could carry me, and having gained the door, I saw him gliding rapidly along towards the Lake, where he leaped into a boat—in which sat a little black man. In a moment they had gained the middle of the lake—the next they were lost to my view for ever.

Deeply musing on the extraordinary occurrences I had witnessed, and scarcely believing their reality, though evidenced by so many of my senses, I returned to the inn; and but for an injury which I had sustained from the fall I got, could almost have persuaded myself, that the entire was a vision of my brain.

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